

AHRQ Grantee Profiles



Grant Title: Improving Health Outcomes

Principal Investigator: Karen B. DeSalvo, M.D., M.P.H., M.Sc., Acting Assistant Secretary for Health

Institution: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Grantee Since: 2006

Type of Grant: Mentored Clinical Scientist Development Award

Karen B. DeSalvo, M.D., M.P.H., M.Sc., Acting Assistant Secretary for Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, is a physician and former AHRQ grantee who has focused her 20-year career on improving access to affordable, high-quality care for all people – especially vulnerable populations. She has done this through direct patient care, medical education, policy and administrative roles, research, and public service.

Dr. DeSalvo received help from AHRQ's grant program to establish her career as an applied health services researcher with a focus on improving health outcomes for disadvantaged populations with chronic disease. This led to her research on topics such as hypertension, cardiovascular disease, and post-traumatic stress syndrome in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. After the hurricane wiped out many of the city's clinical infrastructures, Dr. DeSalvo led efforts to rebuild with an innovative model of neighborhood-based primary care and mental health services for low-income, uninsured, and other vulnerable individuals. Called [504HealthNet](#), the program is an award-winning association that consists of 23 nonprofit and governmental organizations.

"The AHRQ award allowed me to develop the expertise I needed to serve the New Orleans community when it was most critical," says Dr. DeSalvo. "The devastation became an opportunity to build an innovative model that is still serving disadvantaged patients today."

Dr. DeSalvo has served in many leadership positions, both at local and national levels. In her current role, she oversees 12 core public health offices – including the Office of the Surgeon General and the U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps – as well as 10 regional health offices across the Nation and 10 Presidential and Secretarial

advisory committees. Her office develops policy recommendations for public health issues.

In her previous role as the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, she set policy and the strategic direction for the Nation's health IT efforts. Her office's achievements in technology interoperability serve as a foundational element for high-quality American health care.

The recipient of many honors, Dr. DeSalvo was named one of the 50 most influential physician executives and leaders by *Modern Healthcare* in 2015 and 2016.

Consistent with its mission, AHRQ provides a broad range of extramural research grants and contracts, research training, conference grants, and intramural research activities. AHRQ is committed to fostering the next generation of health services researchers who can focus on some of the most important challenges facing our Nation's health care system.

To learn more about AHRQ's Research Education and Training Programs, please visit <http://www.ahrq.gov/training>.

